



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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West Nile virus found in Washington horse

OLYMPIA – The state Department of Agriculture announced today that West Nile virus has been confirmed in a 14-year-old horse in Island County. The horse, which became ill early in October, is recovering. It is the first horse known to have become infected with West Nile virus in Washington.

“This is a reminder for horse owners to consider vaccinating their horses,” said Dr. Robert Mead, state veterinarian. “Now may be a good time to act because the vaccine requires two doses three to six weeks apart, and immunity will not be achieved until five weeks after the second vaccine. An annual booster should be given just prior to the start of the mosquito season in your area.”

The Island County horse received the two-shot vaccine Sept. 4 and Oct. 2. The animal became ill 10 days later, indicating that a mosquito bit it before immunity was established.

The test results were reported by the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory in Pullman and confirmed yesterday by the National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa.

West Nile virus is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito and can infect people, horses, and many types of birds. Scientists do not believe the virus is spread from person to person or from animal to person. Mosquitoes get infected when they feed on an infected bird.

West Nile virus affects horses, mules, donkeys, and other equines much more often than other domestic animals. Most horses do not become ill and show no symptoms at all. Those that do become ill show signs such as loss of appetite, loss of coordination, confusion, head pressing, fever, stiffness and muscle weakness. About one-third of horses that become ill die.

The best way to minimize the threat of West Nile virus is to control mosquito populations and prevent horses from being exposed to adult mosquitoes. Some protective measures include changing the water in livestock troughs, fountains, birdbaths and wading pools weekly during mosquito season. Owners may also consider draining or treating stagnant water, mowing grass and weeds, applying repellents, putting up screens to protect homes and stables from mosquitoes, and putting horses in stables at night. Repellents and insecticides should be used only according to directions.

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To report a potential case of West Nile virus in horses, call the State Veterinarian's Office at (360) 902-1878, or the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Olympia at (360) 753-9430. A fact sheet on West Nile virus is available on the WSDA Website at www.wa.gov/agr/News/2002/attachments/WestNileVirus.pdf.

For information about West Nile virus surveillance or human health issues, contact the Washington State Department of Health Communications Office at (360) 236-4076.

The Department of Health West Nile virus Web site (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/EHP/TS/ZOO/WNV/WNV.HTML>) has more information. Other sources include the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Web site at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/wnv/>, or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/qa/wnv_dogs_cats.htm

The Department of Agriculture is working with other state agencies, including the Departments of Ecology, Health, and Fish and Wildlife on West Nile virus planning and prevention.

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